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ABSTRACT

The uses and limitations of tests and college admissions policies and procedures are considered, and some testing/admissions guidelines for selective graduate and professional schools in the post-Bakke era are suggested. Among the uses of tests are the following: diagnosing academic deficiencies and weaknesses; determining the level of mastery; identifying the very able and the very weak students who apply to selective institutions; and predicting how individuals will perform in the future with respect to relevant criteria. Four things that tests cannot do are: measure innate ability, measure without substantial error, measure drive or persistence, and predict with any substantial accuracy who will or will not succeed in a given profession. The purpose or role of public policy where admission to professional schools is concerned is to serve the public interest. The purpose or role of academic policy is to insure the educational integrity of the educational programs and the institutions involved for the larger good. It is suggested that effective affirmative action admissions programs include: programs with a common set of admissions criteria and a single admissions procedure that takes into consideration race or ethnic designation, disadvantage, geographical location, or other relevant factors that serve the public or academic interests of the schools involved; programs with admissions criteria that are matched with human service needs; programs that carefully assess socioeconomic disadvantage; and programs that do not heavily emphasize test scores. The Harvard admissions program utilizes race as one criterion for selection, sets no specific quotas in an effort to achieve diversity, and recruits widely and vigorously to increase the diversity and size of the eligible pool of students. (SW)

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Testing/Admissions: What Can and Cannot be Done

The Bakke Case may be or may become the only case in the history of the Supreme Court in which the pre-decision reverberations far exceed the post-decision reverberations, for few, if any, issues to be considered by the Court have been so freighted with emotion. There are, nevertheless, two matters that will continue for some time to demand attention on the part of those who recommend or make policies in higher education, as well as those who administer them: (1) Tests and (2) admissions policies and procedures.

Thus in the course of these remarks, I shall attempt to do three things:

1. To suggest what tests, as instruments with serious limitations, can and cannot do;
2. To suggest some major distinctions between the role of public and educational policy on the one hand and tests on the other;
3. To suggest some testing/admissions guidelines for selective graduate and profesional schools for this post-Bakke era.

What Tests Can and Cannot Do

Very many years ago when I, as a young graduate student, was enrolled in my first educational measurement course, I became hooked on what appeared to me, at the time, to be a profound and enduring principle of measurement. It was written by W. A. McCall and it said: "Everything that exists, exists in some amount and anything that exists in some amount, can be measured." Now, nearly 40 years later, and very much unhooked, I consider the statement to be one of the most visionary ever written by a responsible scholar. It's not that it may not be ultimately true, but it may take several more generations, even in fast moving times such as these, to become a working principle in the

educational establishment. My allusion to this ancient assertion is relevant, I think, because too many Americans in places of power believe that tests can do just about anything--that they possess a divining mystique that can do for aptitude, ability, and subsequent performance what a set of scales can do for weight or what a tape measure can do for length. And this is patently not the case.

Research and development in testing over the past 35 or 40 years have improved tests to the point where they can do a number of very useful things:

1. They can diagnose academic deficiences and weaknesses but far too few excellent instruments have been developed for this purpose;[1]
2. They can determine the level of mastery, i.e., how much a student knows in a number of subjects or fields;
3. They can identify, with reasonable accuracy, the very able and the very weak students who apply for admission to selective institutions;
4. They can indicate, in general terms, the level at which a student or a group of students is performing with respect to some relevant criterion or criteria;
5. They can determine, within generally recognized margins of error, the readiness of individuals or groups to perform certain skills or enter certain professions--provided the skills involved or the functions required by the profession can be clearly identified and described;

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1. T. Anne Cleary, et al: "Educational Uses of Tests with Disadvantaged Students", American Psychologist, January 1975. pp. 15-45.

6. They can predict, by sampling behavior, how individuals will perform in the future with respect to relevant criteria, within reasonably definable limits of error.[1]

This list is, of course not intended to be exhaustive.

In indicating what tests can do, it is assumed for the purposes of this discussion, that the instruments are soundly constructed, properly administered, competently interpreted and fairly used.

But no matter how soundly they are constructed or how efficiently they are administered, or how competently they are interpreted, or how fairly they are used, there are at least four things that tests cannot do:

1. They cannot measure innate ability—only current performance;[2]
2. They cannot measure without substantial error—thereby classifying some students as potential successes who will fail and some as potential failures who will succeed;
3. They cannot measure drive, motivation or persistence—attributes that frequently compensate, to significant degrees, for modest ability;
4. They cannot predict, with any substantial accuracy, who will or will not succeed in a given profession—success in a profession being a function of many variables; not simply academic ability.

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1. For an illustration of how large errors can be made even on good instruments, See: Leo Goldman. "Test Information in Counselling: A Critical View" in "Measurement for Self Understanding and Personal Development". Proceedings of the 1973 Invitational Conference on Testing Problems. Educational Testing Service.

2. Cleary, et al., Op. Cit.

These limitations alone suggest that serious considerations be given to factors other than test performance where admission to selective institutions is concerned. Even more importantly, it should be remembered that institutions of higher learning are established to serve certain public purposes and this brings us to the matter of policy.

Tests and Policy

It should be made clear at the outset that admission to a professional school or to any highly selective institution of higher learning is not the choice between qualified and unqualified applicants; the choice is from among qualified applicants—all of whom are able to pursue the work required. To suggest otherwise is to confuse the issue with a red herring. Qualified applicants will, however, bring different attributes and different degrees of qualification to the study for a profession.

As the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education points out, the public has a clear interest in the problem of access to higher education and especially to graduate and professional education. This interest, according to the Council, is rooted in the following:[1]

1. The need to have individuals trained in areas vital to the well-being of the entire society;
2. The role professional schools can play in determining composition of professions and thus the services available to society;

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1. Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, "The Relevance of Race in Admissions: A Summary of the Position of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education as Reported in "Selective Admissions in Higher Education: Public Policy and Academic Policy," 1978.

3. The need to meet the "diversified needs of a heterogeneous, pluralistic nation";
4. The need for individuals of potential talent from all segments of society to have a fair chance to rise to positions of leadership, both in simple justice to them and for their service as leaders and models for those in each segment of the society.

This public interest cannot be served by merely selecting for admission those applicants with the highest combinations of test scores and grades--important as they are. Moreover, as the Carnegie Council further points out, tests and grades are not sufficient as a sole basis for decision. "They are best" it says, "at identifying at one end of the spectrum those applicants who are likely to distinguish themselves academically and at the other end those likely to fail--and failure is costly to the student and to the institutions. They are insufficient for determining the admission of a great many persons found between these extremes." [1] (Emphasis supplied) In other words, there is a need for an admissions policy which serves both the public and the academic interests.

Tests are only instruments which are useful in helping to set and implement policy--policy defined as a definite principle or method of action selected from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions with respect to admission to highly selective graduate and professional schools. But in the setting of a policy that serves both the public and academic interests, there is no substitute for human judgment.

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1. Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, Op. Cit., p. 5

In brief, the purpose or role of public policy where admission to professional schools is concerned is to serve the public interest. The purpose or role of academic policy is to insure the educational integrity of the educational programs and the institutions involved for the larger good. Public and academic policies should, of course, be mutually complementing.

Suggested Testing Admissions Guidelines

Paul Fruend, the distinguished professor emeritus of law of the Harvard Law School, has written some penetrating comments about the Bakke decision: "Hard cases often make fuzzy law. We do know that Mr. Bakke is entitled to enroll in his medical course, but beyond that the court has given us little definitive guidance in the field of racial preference." He commented further that the real significance of the case is that "we are dealing with a complex problem whose outer contours can be drawn by judges but whose resolution lies within a wide spectrum of moral and practical choices to be made by ourselves, choices that consider not only individual rights but the health of the society in which those rights are asserted."[1] Professor Fruend, I think, is correct. The resolution of the problem we now inherit in the post-Bakke era does rest largely with the universities which can indeed make their decisions from a wide range of choices--moral and practical.

Where the real "cannot's" are concerned, there was only one of any importance and that was decided by the narrowest of margins--5 to 4. In effect, the majority (Powell, Berger, Stevens, Rehnquist and Stewart) held that the racial "quota" system employed by the University of California at

1. Paul Fruend, "Bakke: The Choices that Remain", The New York Times, July 9, 1978, p. E-17.

Davis was unacceptable as a basis for deciding who should be admitted. Thus any institution that bases its policy on this principle should, I think, be advised that such a policy belongs in the "Cannot" column.*

Where the "Can" column is concerned, there were two major positions:

1. Race or ethnic designation may be included as one consideration in the admissions process--the Harvard College admissions program being cited with approbation;
2. Affirmative action, at least by implication, is acceptable.

Given these two "positive" aspects of the decision, the following, by extension, it seems to me, belong in the column of what is permissible:

1. Programs with a common set of admissions criteria and a single admissions procedure (not a two-tract procedure) that takes into consideration race or ethnic designation, disadvantage geographical location, or other relevant factors that serve the public or academic interests of the institutions involved, e.g., Michigan State University's School of Human Medicine which has a 23 percent minority enrollment.
2. Programs with admissions criteria which are matched with human service needs. Examples include the University of California's Medical School at San Francisco which has a sub-committee of the admissions committee concerned with identifying prospective medical researchers and McMaster University's Medical School (Canada) which seeks applicants with community work experience and small-group, problem-solving skills to become competent primary care physicians.

* If previous discrimination has been demonstrated, "quotas" could conceivably, be legal.

3. Programs that carefully assess socio-economic disadvangage, e.g., the University of Texas Medical School at San Antonio where 22 percent of the 1978 entering class is disadvantaged and of this group, 60 percent are Spanish surnamed, 15 percent Black and 25 percent White.
4. Programs that do not heavily emphasize test scores, e.g., Michigan State University which converts the range of test scores into a six-point scale.[1]

In addition to all of the above, an effective Affirmative Action Program should also bring substantial numbers of minorities to the faculties, the administrative staffs and the governing boards. These minority members can serve as internal monitors where effective minority admissions programs are concerned and generally raise the minority-sensitive levels of professional schools.

While the Court frowned upon quotas, it should be born in mind that admissions programs that produce very few or no minority admissions should be subjected to critical examination. In such a situation, the Harvard program could be useful. For the academic year 1977-78, this program achieved an enrollment which included 8.1 percent Blacks, 46 percent Hispanics, 5.7 percent Asians, 8 American Indians, or a total minority enrollment of 18.8 percent. Those institutions concerned about the legality of either existing or proposed admissions programs, should also examine the Harvard admissions programs with special care, since Justice Powell specifically cited this program approvingly. The essential principles that characterize this

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1. These four points are adapted from Bruce Fuller, "Alternatives After Bakke: Issues for Campus and Government Policy Makers." California Post Secondary Commission, 1978. See also: Winton H. Manning, "Beyond Bakke": The Unfinished Business in Admissions", Current Issues in Higher Education. Washington, D. C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1978.

program are, in my opinion, four in number:

1. It is built on a very strong commitment to a diverse student body for the educative value of diversity;
2. It utilizes race as one criterion for selection;
3. It recruits widely and vigorously to increase the diversity and size of the eligible pool of students;
4. It sets no specific quotas in the effort to achieve diversity.

Not every institution can or should copy Harvard. The essential principles, however, can go a long way toward determining what can be done.

The bottom line of these remarks is that in the Bakke decision, the Court left great lattitude for institutions sincerely desiring to redress racial, ethnic and other critical imbalances in highly selective professional and graduate schools. And considered in this light, Bakke is not a disaster—except as institutions, with faint hearts and feeble moral commitments to equality of opportunity proceed to make it so.

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